



Pioneers

Suggested Post-visit Activities

These activities are tied into the Missouri, Illinois, and national standards for Social Studies and Language Arts.



Lesson Overview

Students will use the knowledge and insight they gained during the on-site programming to complete the activities and make a personal connection with the nineteenth century pioneer spirit.

Objectives

Students who participate in this activity(ies) will be able to:

- Analyze primary documents
- Make emotional connections with pioneers of the nineteenth century
- Make comparisons between the past, present and future
- Make predictions about the future

Follow-Up Activities

How do we know about people who lived in the past? One way historians learn about events in history is to read actual accounts written by people who experienced them. Because many of the pioneers felt compelled to write down their thoughts, feelings and describe daily routines, we can enjoy a better understanding of history. The entries below come from actual pioneer journals. Divide your class into groups. Have each group read a different passage (for younger students you may want to read the passages with them) and decide together how the writer must have felt at the time. Have each group share their findings. Use the questions below to stimulate a discussion.

- What can you learn from the diary entry about life on the Oregon Trail?
- How do you think the person who wrote the entry was feeling? Why?
- Have you ever had something happen that made you feel the same way?
- If so discuss it with your group.

Never can I forget the morning when we bade farewell . . . We were surrounded by loved ones, and there stood all my little schoolmates, who had come to kiss me good-bye. My father with tears in his eyes tried to smile as one friend after another grasped his hands in last farewell. Mama was overcome with grief."

Virginia Reed, age 13, April 1846

Pioneer Children on the Journey West, Emmy E. Werner

When we reached the first crossing of the stream, all stood aghast. It seemed impossible that any wagon could cross over the rocks, but what could we do? We just had to cross over, so the men mustered up courage and made the attempt. I watched one wagon cross. As many men could get hold of the wagon went into the stream and literally carried the wagon over the rocks. The poor oxen fell down time and again before they reached the other side. Each wagon went through the same trial until all had crossed. It took us the whole day to go four miles.

Mary E. Ackley, 1852

Covered Wagon Women

We came near losing our pet antelope this evening. As she was frisking about the camp, a man from another camp was about to shoot her, thinking she was a wild one. She ran to another camp where a woman got hold of her and held her, and would scarcely believe that she belonged to me, though the poor little thing was struggling to get away and bleating piteously for me. Finally she got away and came bounding to me and followed me home.

Eliza McAuley, 17 year old diarist, 1852 Crossing

Pioneer Children on the Journey West, Emmy E. Werner

[A]t a meeting of the men of the wagon train it was decided to throw away every bit of surplus weight so that better speed could be made. . . A man named Smith had a wooden rolling pin that it was decided was useless and must be abandoned.

I shall never forget how that big man stood there with tears streaming down his face as he said, 'do I have to throw this away? It was my mother's. I remember she always used it to toll out her biscuits, and they were awful good biscuits.

Lucy Ann Henderson Deady, Age eleven in 1846

Pioneer Children on the Journey West, Emmy E. Werner

June 3. . . we traveled 4 miles the river and encamped here we found nine waggons bound for oregon. . . June 6 made 18 miles passed 70 oregon waggons as they were encamped. . . June 17 made 12 miles fell in with 18 waggons broke an exeltree, (axle) layed by and made a new one stood guard all night in the rain.

Elizabeth Dixon Smith*

Followed the road to Oregon in 1848 with her husband and eight children

Covered Wagon Women

Last night my clothes got out of the wagon & the oxen eat them up & I consider I have met with a great loss as it was my woolen dress. . .

Parthenia Blank

From a diary kept together with her twin sister, Cecelia Adams during an 1852 crossing.

Covered Wagon Women

Have students fold a piece of paper in half. On one side have them list all the good things about traveling on the Oregon Trail. On the other side have them list the negative things about traveling on the Oregon Trail.

Many wagon trains did not travel on Sundays as a way of observing the Sabbath, as well as to regain their strength and energy so they could push hard on the other six days. Some wagon trains resisted stopping on Sundays, for fear they would lose too much time. Have students discuss the pros and cons of stopping on Sundays and then have students vote on the two options. Wagon trains often used this form of democracy to settle issues and disputes. Brainstorm other decisions that a wagon train would have to face as they traveled west. Listed below are some suggestions.

River Crossings: The river we are approaching has swollen beyond its banks. Crossing it will be dangerous, but it could take days before it recedes. What should we do and why?

Overloaded Wagons: The wagon loads are heavy. As we approach the mountains, the oxen are having a harder time pulling the wagons. What should we do and why?

Food shortage: Our collective food supply is very low. The last fort on the trail is up ahead. We can purchase food there, but the prices are so high, it will cost us almost all the money we have left. Should we spend the money or just try to make it to Oregon?

Old diaries, journals, and letters reveal a lot about what life was like in the past. Often they are not the words of famous people but of people with common, everyday experiences. Have students begin a journaling project. Remind them that someday historians, teachers and students may use their words to learn about the past.

Besides keeping diaries or journals, another way to inform future generations about life in the twenty-first century is by creating a time capsule. Discuss with students what things should be included in your time capsule that are representative of their lifestyle. You may even want to suggest it become a school project.

Pioneer families only bought goods they needed to survive the long, hard trip. Food was one of the important provisions pioneers needed to purchase. Both the weight and cost of the food needed to be considered. Listed below are common food items used by pioneers along with their 1849 prices. Encourage students to investigate these items at the grocery store or using store advertisements. Compare and contrast the nineteenth century prices to current prices for the same items. How much more do they cost today?

1849 Prices, St. Louis, Missouri

Coffee	0.08 per lb.	Dried Fruit	0.06 per lb.
Tea	0.55 per lb.	Salt	0.06 per lb.
Bacon	0.05 per lb.	Soap	0.11 per lb.
Flour	0.02 per lb.	Candles	0.11 per lb.
Rice	0.05 per lb.	Lard	0.05 per lb.

Are there pioneers today? Of course there are! Scientists and other researchers can be pioneers in their field of study. Scientists make new discoveries in biology, medicine, and technology. Like pioneers of the past, today's pioneers venture into unknown areas and must be prepared for the job ahead. In comparison, students can prepare for their own futures by staying in school in order to get a good education.

Stimulate a class discussion using the following questions:

- What qualities do these modern day pioneers have in common with each other? With the Oregon Trail pioneers?
- What in your opinion is the most admirable quality of a pioneer?
- Do you know someone who is a pioneer? What new thought or activity did they originate?
- Have you ever played the role of a pioneer?
